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Just Words: Understanding the Fullness of the Gospel

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the loyalty of every one of his worker-priests even when they were disappointed in him. His embarrassing silence with respect to treatment of the Jews during the German occupation receives sufficient attention, but the full depths of anti-Judaism within the church await more analysis which likely will cast more shame on the cardinal. His behaviour, in spite of political limitations, appeared tawdry in light of such figures as Cardinals Saliège and Gerlier.

Nonetheless, the heroic figure who strides across major changes in France and within its church emerges as most convincing in Dr. Masson's work. Her portrayal of a pious, conservative figure compelled by his faith to be a pastor in a changing world rings true. His courage in the trenches, the loyalty he inspired, his commitment to working-class justice and specialized Catholic Action, his relationship with clerical and lay leaders, his capacity for dialogue and his openness to Vatican II combine to make him a compelling figure. Catherine Masson has achieved her goal admirably in her presentation of a French Catholic leader of faith and integrity who straddled a radically changing church with creativity and vision in his four-decade episcopate.

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Just Words: Understanding the Fullness of the Gospel

Jacob A. O. Preus

St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000

235 pages, \$18.05 Softcover

At first glance Jacob A. O. Preus' work *Just Words: Understanding the Fullness of the Gospel* may appear to be yet another heavy-handed attempt to define the nature and limits of that most fundamental of Christian doctrines, the gospel. Preus would certainly not be the first to negotiate this theological minefield in order to categorize the same gospel that audaciously defies such categorization. To ask and the answer the question "What is the

gospel?" is (or should be) as much a part of Christian prolegomena as defining theology or dogma. Thus extended focus on the gospel has been the foundation for innumerable works from all denominations. Yet what Preus has produced is not just more arch conservative bluster. The work is eminently useful for its simplicity, depth and clarity. *Just Words* is both thoughtful and thought provoking, and is appropriate for laypersons and trained church workers looking for a lucid reference or devotional tool of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The beauty of *Just Words* is found in its lack of distracting complexity. Preus has consciously chosen to strip off the veneer of jargon to reveal the utter explicitness that is the true gospel. He makes this point clear from the outset. "The ultimate purpose for writing this book is to hold before God's people the fullness of the biblical witness to the Gospel so the Scriptures may truly be a fount and source not only of faith and life, but also of the language to glorify Christ and to serve His people" (11).

Part One of the book circumscribes and explicates his program. In chapter 1 Preus states the gospel is first and foremost the good news for all under the curse of sin and death. It has both a human and a divine component acting in perfect concert, and is the vehicle for justification "by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith alone, apart from works of the Law" (22). In this way Preus places himself squarely in concert with historic Christianity.

Chapter 2 expounds on the means by which the gospel actualized. The gospel is alive in a real sense because it is the Word of God and because it is words. Words can and do convey the power of God unto salvation, and thus they should not be limited to certain comfortable and pat phrases. There is more than one way to pronounce the gospel, but "there is no way to say the Gospel and spell out the implications of the Gospel without words, without metaphors" (34). This is as it should be, since a good metaphor may be far more potent than a literal statement, no matter how incisive that literal statement may be. In other words, we should not be afraid to perceive the gospel as possessing nuances. Preus points out that our attempts to distill the gospel to a single theme or picture is dangerous and unnecessary. Such distillation causes us to "generalize metaphors and flatten them out so they all end up meaning virtually the same thing. We wind up with the doctrinal nutrients, but we lose the distinctive flavours of the language" (36).

In Parts Two through Seven Preus “interprets and applies the Gospel to virtually all of life’s contexts” (book jacket). He identifies twenty-four separate and particular gospel metaphors and places them under the general headings of creation, commerce, legal, personal, sacrificial and deliverance metaphors. Each chapter follows a prescribed format. They begin with a short illustrative life situation that serves to put flesh on the metaphor. A short exegetical study of pertinent scripture passages follows, along with a careful endeavour to separate the gospel metaphor from its law counterpart. This format gives these chapters a decidedly sermonic, if somewhat repetitive, tone.

Part Eight exhorts the reader to share these remarkable metaphors with others, for this is the peculiar and essential mission of all believers. As Preus declares, “the words with which Christians go out into all the world are not just words ... because they are the very words of Christ, the Word of the Gospel The words themselves are powerful, rich, and evocative, not just words. They are words that make us just” (221).

In sum, *Just Words* is an enjoyable and beneficial primer on the gospel for Christians of all stripes.

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Edward Schillebeeckx and Hans Frei: A Conversation on Method and Christology

Marguerite Abdul-Masih

Waterloo ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001

193 pages, \$ 45.45 Softcover

Marguerite Abdul-Masih has written a book that is important for at least two reasons. First, she introduces readers to the work of Hans Frei and Edward Schillebeeckx in a concise, fair and manageable manner. She carefully articulates their most important themes against the backdrop of broader theological movements, notes the genesis of